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SUBJECT: LITTLE CHANCE ARROYO WILL FOLLOW THE THAKSIN ROUTE

¶1. (SBU) The Philippine public -- or at least the political elites in Manila, opposition groups, and the media -- have followed with great interest the recent political developments in Thailand that led to snap elections and the decision by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to resign. The opposition has renewed its calls for President Arroyo similarly to step down and/or hold to snap elections, options that Malacanang has definitely ruled out. Police had to use water cannons to disperse a group of about 1,500 protesters calling anew for the President's resignation near Malacanang on April 6 under the controversial "Calibrated Preemptive Response" (CPR) policy, on which the Supreme Court heard arguments on April 4. GRP officials have also vigorously protested the critical editorial "Dark Days for Philippine Democracy" in the April 5 "New York Times."

¶2. (SBU) Comment: All indications -- private and public -- are that President Arroyo has no intention of leaving office before 2010, still believes that the decisive action in proclaiming a State of National Emergency in February was justified and successful, and intends to continue to work on her agenda, including charter change, despite her sagging popularity and legal challenges to Executive Orders 464 (limiting Congressional testimony by government officials) and 1017 (proclaiming the State of National Emergency) and to the CPR, as well as expected cases against the ongoing "People's Initiative" for constitutional amendment to a parliamentary system. The irony that it was the parliamentary system in Thailand that enabled the toppling of Thaksin appears lost on GMA supporters in their quest to transform the Philippines from the current presidential model to a unicameral parliamentary system. however.

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Kenney